

Summary: The world seems determined to keep Snape from his plans...

Categories: [Harry Potter](#) Characters: Albus Dumbledore, Harry/Draco, Severus/Remus

Genres: None

Warnings: Anal Sex, Brain-Insane, Complete, Language, m/m, Violence

Challenges: None

Series: Adjustments

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Story Notes:

Author's Notes: This is the sequel to part one of 'Adjustments' and that story should be read first or this one won't make much sense... 'Adjustments' is available at the Master and Wolf archive and my own website. The first part and most of this part of the story was written before the POA movie and does not reflect the look of the werewolf in any way. Lupin's wolf form looks like a larger than average wolf. I also prefer to imagine Lupin as looking like a rumpled Ralph Fiennes instead of David Thewliss, but you can imagine him however you wish. ;)

I want to thank everyone who sent me feedback on part one of 'Adjustments' - your kind words meant a great deal to me and feedback always inspires me to continue when I suffer from writer's block or from frustration. Thank you! I meant this part to be the end of the story, but alas - it promises to have one more part still to come. That could be taken as a good thing or a bad thing...I suppose it is up to you.

And I'd like to dedicate this fic to Juxian Tang whose great fic never fails to make me shiver with anticipation before I've even read a word.

\*\*Not suitable for minors!! OotP Spoilers.

## 1. [Chapter 1](#) by Nikita

Chapter 1 by Nikita

X O X O X O X

Harry,

I was glad to receive your owl last evening, as I have been feeling rather guilty at being so out of touch with you lately. The truth is that I needed a break from the house and Mrs. Black's not-so-pleasant voice for a little while. I am currently visiting with a friend who isn't feeling very well. I will be sure to write you again soon to discuss our plans for Christmas week - keep up your hard work in your classes and don't forget that these last two years of study are the most important for your future as I'm sure Hermione has told you and Ron repeatedly. Good luck to the three of you on your exams...

Remus

Remus stared at the parchment before him in frustration. It was only three weeks to Christmas and he still hadn't broached the idea of spending the holiday with Harry to Severus. He had originally planned to go to Hogwarts to visit Harry in a neutral setting rather than at Grimmauld place where it would be difficult to summon much Christmas cheer. But now...what was he going to do? He couldn't leave Severus alone on the holidays (much less pregnant and alone) and Snape was still insistent that he would \*not\* be persuaded to set foot outside his house until after the birth. Which left asking Severus if he could invite Harry \*here\*.

It wasn't something he looked forward to doing.

XOXOXOX

Breakfast was usually a quiet affair; Remus didn't understand why they even bothered with formality of sitting down in the dining room for a large meal when Severus usually ended up only nibbling on toast and sipping at weak tea. He'd asked once and the only reply was a terse, 'tradition'. Snape certainly wasn't much of a morning person.

Be that as it may, Lupin decided to risk broaching the idea of Christmas over sausage and eggs the next morning. "I received an owl from Harry last night - he was worried when Fred and George Weasley tried to visit me at Grimmauld Place a few days ago. Apparently he asked them to check in with me."

"Hm."

"I told him not to worry, that I'm visiting a friend..."

Severus turned a page of the Daily Prophet without responding.

"And that I'd have to owl him back later about plans for the holidays...what are your plans, by the way?" Remus kept his head bent over his task of buttering his toast, but he sneaked a peak to see that Severus' mouth had tightened at his question. It was the only reaction he got. "Well...I thought it might be nice to spend the holidays together...the three of us, that is..."

The Daily Prophet was taking the brunt of the abuse as Snape *\*still\** didn't speak, but instead rustled the pages loudly as he finished it.

Deciding there was nothing to do, but forge ahead, Remus took a deep breath and continued, "So since you probably don't want to go to Hogwarts for Christmas..."

"No." The word was clipped and cold.

"...I was hoping you might let me invite Harry here." Severus finally looked at him and Remus was surprised to see that he didn't look angry, but rather wary as he put a hand on his belly - it was getting larger by the day, it seemed and it was only seven and half months along. What would he look like by the end?

"I thought you understood that this must be kept a secret."

"I do - you could hide the pregnancy again as you did before. He won't be able to smell the difference or sense the charm like I did. It would only be a few days..."

Severus sighed deeply and looked down at his half-finished toast on the plate before him. "I was under the impression that Christmas was only one day."

Remus sensed the imminent capitulation and turned his tone to wheedling. "Oh, come on, the day before and after are just as important."

Snape pushed the plate away and heaved himself up from the chair. "Very well, but I don't understand why you can't simply go to Hogwarts *\*without\** me."

Thrilled to know that he'd gotten his way, Lupin smiled and shrugged, "I doubt I'd be let back through the wards again if I left."

Severus snorted, "Perceptive," he muttered as he left the room.

XOXOXOX

With his guest hurrying away to write another owl, Snape decided to work in the greenhouse for

the rest of the morning. His pregnancy had reached the point in which he could no longer safely mix potions, not even the simple restorative potions he'd made for Lupin several weeks ago. Luckily the werewolf seemed to have regained his health and no longer needed them. Severus' own sense of uselessness at his inability to do potions had frustrated him to the point where he was now resorting to herbology in order to keep busy. It was a fairly pleasant and mindless task into which he could safely pour his restless energy and frustrations. He found the simple act of pruning and watering to have a restorative effect on his peace of mind.

Putting on his thick boots and outdoor cloak, he trudged across the snow towards the small building not far from the main house. Creeping vines and thorny plants welcomed him in the moist heat of the greenhouse - a pleasant change from the cold air outside. The faint earth magic that glowed within kept the plants at the right temperature and humidity.

Severus restlessly looked around for a task to do, but soon realized that his refuge was not soothing his mind that day. Banging a pot onto the rough wooden counter, he gritted his teeth in anger. What on earth had he been thinking to allow Lupin to invite The Boy Who Lived into his house? He'd far rather suffer the cruciatus curse repeatedly while having his fingernails ripped out and salt poured into the wounds than spend the holiday with the insolent brat for \*three\* bloody days.

And yet he'd caved without so much as a protest. Was he going mad? Had the pregnancy hormones finally addled his brains to the point that he'd go along with such a horrible plan simply because Lupin's pleading hazel eyes had looked hopefully into his own as he'd asked and he'd felt any drop of his own will melt away at their warmth?

The sheer intensity of his anger surprised even himself - his hormones 'were' getting the best of him. If it really bothered him this much to have Potter in his house then he could simply go to Lupin right that instant and tell him he'd changed his mind. It was 'his' house after all. But just as quickly he remembered the look on Lupin's face when he'd acquiesced. Did he really have the strength to put up with Lupin's kicked-puppy look when he reneged on the holiday?

Looking though the window at the silhouette of the house he sighed heavily and sat down on the stool next to him. Staring morosely at the pot of soil before him he admitted that no, he couldn't.

Damned hormones.

XOX

Remus woke each morning at Snape Manor with greater spirits and comfort than he had ever known at Grimmauld Place. The house elves worked hard at keeping the place warm and cheering and as he left his room one morning two weeks before Christmas, he noticed that the house elves had been putting particular effort in decorating for the holidays. Fresh boughs of pine and holly decorated the banisters and mantels that he passed on the way to the dining room and spicy gingerbread wafted from the direction of the kitchens.

Harry, with approval from Dumbledore, had accepted his invitation to spend Christmas with him at his 'friend's' house and Remus hoped that the pleasant surroundings of Snape Manor would help soothe the upcoming surprise of their host's identity. Harry's attitude towards the potions master likely hadn't improved since the last time Lupin had seen the two together, but he hoped that Harry would be polite. Snape, for his credit, hadn't grumbled about the upcoming visit at all. Of course - the other wizard had seemed rather preoccupied in his greenhouse of late.

"Good morning, Severus," he said cheerfully as he sat down next to him at the table. A large plate of eggs appeared before him as he lifted his napkin.

"That is 'some' people's opinion."

Remus looked up to see that Snape was faintly green as he contemplated Remus' eggs over his own cup of tea and toast. "Sorry. I could eat in the kitchen if it bothers you so much."

"No. Just hurry up and eat them, will you?" Snape turned back to his folded copy of the Daily Prophet while Remus dug into his food. As he finished, Remus pushed his plate aside and turned his attention to his own cup of tea. His plate promptly vanished.

"Your potion should be arriving within a few hours," Snape said quietly without lifting his eyes from his paper.

"Yes...I suppose we should discuss where I'll change. Is my room sufficient?" Remus tried not to let his disappointment seep into his voice. He would most certainly be alone for this transformation without the excuse of his ill health this time. He so loathed those lonely nights as a wolf trapped in a room to pace alone.

Severus looked up just as Remus was looking out the window longingly. "You could roam outside if you wish...the grounds are protected by nearly as many wards as Hogwarts and there are no pesky students in the way out there."

Lupin felt an excited thrill at the offer and smiled mischievously. "You don't mind if I eat a rabbit or two, then?"

Snape grimaced and shrugged. "If you can contemplate eating one raw while of your own mind in wolf form - help yourself. Just don't tell me the details after." With that the potions master pushed out of the chair with a groan and shuffled away, presumably towards his precious plants.

That evening, after his potion had been drunk and the sun was setting, Lupin stood in the middle of the lawn and waited. He was waiting until the last moment to remove his robes. A cold wind made him clutch the fabric tighter, but he wouldn't mind the temperature as much as a wolf. Remus tried to think back to the last time he'd been able to wander freely around in the forest during a change. Not in many years - after school he hadn't had his friends around every month and after James had died and Peter and Sirius...well, those times had been far darker than he preferred to remember. He'd locked himself up every month during those years and afterwards, at Hogwarts as a professor - that was the first time that the wolfsbane potion had been available to him. But still he'd had to stay within his quarters 'just to be safe.'

If it hadn't been for that night he'd forgotten his potion...that was one night he'd run through the forest. But he couldn't remember that night - or any other night with the Marauders in school and he and Sirius hadn't been allowed on the property around Black Manor, either. So this was the first time he'd be under the influence of the wolfsbane AND allowed outside in safety. It was an experience he relished having. He only regretted he had no one else to share his excitement with.

The moon rose and the light hit his form the moment he disrobed. The familiar pain gripped him, contorting his body until it settled into the wolf form, panting beneath the full moon. The scents and sounds, already loud to his sharpened senses suddenly became more meaningful and urgent. He stretched his limbs and then leapt forward, bounding through the snow towards the distant scent of prey...

It was a marvelous experience to let the wolf do as it wanted while still present in human mind. He would have laughed with delight if possible - how much he'd missed all these years! Some time later a sound from the main house made him pause in his frolicking and he noticed a black form walk out into the snow. Severus!

He raced to meet the human without a thought to how threatening this might seem to the wizard.

Severus watched him with wide eyes, but didn't flinch as Lupin came to a halt several feet away from him. Sitting down on his haunches, Lupin let his tongue loll out as he panted, showing he meant no harm.

"You seemed to be enjoying yourself...catch any rabbits?" Snape's voice was dry, but amused as he observed him.

Lupin licked his chops and smiled inwardly as Severus rolled his eyes.

"Of course - never mind you ate three helpings of lamb stew at dinner." Severus shivered and tucked his hands within his sleeves. His round belly was noticeable even under the heavy woolen robe. Remus wondered at the man coming out in his condition this late at night.

"I thought...I thought I'd see if you wanted to come in yet...it's rather cold," he said finally as if answering Remus' thoughts.

It was unusual to hear such a timid tone from the man and Lupin was curious as to why. He stepped closer and then followed Severus as the wizard walked back towards the house. He was a bit reluctant to go in so soon, but the warmth of the house soon welcomed him back in. He noticed that Snape was carrying a bundle under his arms as he walked down the hallways with him - it was his robe wrapped around his boots which he'd left out in the clearing. He followed curiously as Snape walked on until they came to a door he hadn't been to before.

Silently, Severus waited for him to enter the room before closing the door behind them and walking over to a fireplace. A quick spell and a fire burst to life within the confines. It was a bedroom, or rather, Snape's bedroom. There was a dark gray coverlet on the bed and several bookshelves lining the walls. A large armchair stood before the fireplace which Snape had settled into as Lupin had looked around the room.

As he watched, Severus pulled a book off from a small table next to the chair and began to read, ignoring the werewolf's presence. Now what? Snape had brought him inside to stay in his room and then ignore him? It didn't make sense...unless the potions master was lonely? Had he gotten used to spending the full moon with Lupin enough to seek him out?

It was a rather incredulous thought - but a pleasant one. Deciding to enjoy the warmth and company, Remus moved onto the rug in front of the fireplace and circled three times before dropping down to rest. Propping his head up on one paw he looked back up at Snape in time to see black eyes dart back down to the book. He felt pleasantly tired from his excitement outdoors and his own eyes slowly drifted shut to the sound of turning pages and the faint crackling of the fire.

XOXOXOX

He woke to the usual pain in his joints with a faint groan. His limbs felt leaden and it was difficult to raise his head. It was only when he finally managed to do so that he realized he was in a bed - a rather comfortable one at that. One occupied by another person. Turning his head to the right, he came face to face with Severus Snape. Black tendrils of hair obscured the other man's eyes, but the nose was unmistakable.

What was he doing in Snape's bed? He thought back to the night before and couldn't remember anything past falling asleep on the rug - surely Snape hadn't lifted him up in his condition? At that thought, the large swell of black robes drew his eyes. It wasn't often he got this good of a look at Snape's belly without a glare or acidic comment.

It was fascinating to look at, though - so incongruous on the male form and yet...there was something beautiful about it. Inside that swell was a human life - a mixture of Sirius and Severus

both. A child that would likely have black hair and pale skin. He wondered if he or she would have blue eyes or black, a large nose or a small one, a love for pranks or for potions... So many possibilities... Remus stared reverently, his fingers reaching out to touch it before he even realized it. The soft texture of the robe and then the warmth of the body within made him smile.

There was a sudden snort from the other man and Lupin snatched back his hand as if scalded. There was a tense moment while Remus waited for a shout, a threat or a wand pulled on him, but as the silence wore on he realized that Severus was still sleeping. Deciding not to tempt fate again, he pulled back to his side of the bed and simply watched the other wizard sleep. It had been so long since he'd been in bed with another man - Sirius had snored terribly and hogged all the covers. Snape, by comparison, was rather quiet and peaceful, his breathing deep and even. Remus longed to brush back the black hair that was flopped over his forehead.

He must have drifted off again as the next time he woke the bed was empty and the potions master was nowhere to be seen. He climbed out of the bed and realized he'd been naked in Snape's bed the whole time. His own garments still in the tidy pile where Snape had left them on the dresser last night while Lupin was still in wolf form. Which meant that Severus had lifted him off of the floor, probably through a levitation charm, and deposited him in the bed naked before climbing in fully clothed next to him. The act seemed both intimate and platonic at the same time - an odd mixture that seemed to characterize their relationship since Snape's arrival at Grimmauld Place over a month ago.

Deciding to confront Severus on what had happened, Remus hurriedly dressed and went down to breakfast. Only to find the dining room empty. A house elf popped into existence at his side, "Master Snape said for Nimbly to wait for Master Lupin to wake before serving his breakfast, sir. Master Snape is having much to do in the greenhouse today and isn't to be disturbed, sir. You'll be wanting your eggs now, Master Lupin?"

Severus Snape was obviously a master at avoidance as well as potions - he contrived to be busy the entire day, including meal times, and most especially anytime Remus requested his presence.

The house elves were extremely apologetic, but equally unhelpful in pinning down just 'where' Snape was hiding himself. He wasn't in the greenhouse, he wasn't in his private laboratory and he wasn't in his rooms. Remus would have sworn the man had left the house altogether if he wasn't quite sure that Snape didn't feel safe to leave its walls while still pregnant.

And so Remus shivered alone on the snow-covered lawn waiting for the moon to rise once more, wishing desperately he could understand the enigma that was his host. Ever since Snape had shown up at his doorstep under Dumbledore's orders Lupin had experienced acts of kindness and care from the normally disdainful man. Moments that had reawakened feelings he'd once had for the socially inept boy he'd once known at Hogwarts.

The problem was...he had no idea just how Snape felt about him. He could be kind, yes - but Snape still hid behind his sharp tongue and distant air. Lupin was certainly grown up enough now to recognize these things as defense mechanisms designed to keep everyone at a distance so they didn't get too close and have the chance to hurt him...but how did one go about getting around such engrained behaviors?

The sun had set finally and the moonlight triggered his change, interrupting his thoughts and driving him to focus only on getting past the familiar pain.

He loped through the forest and chased a rabbit or two, but he found that the excitement of the night before eluded him. Lupin found himself returning to the clearing several times to check for any signs of life from the house.

Suddenly the side door opened and there was movement. Remus felt the surge of energy and need to run from the wolf and decided to give it full reign as he raced to the source of his excitement. It was only when he was within twenty feet of the house that his human mind caught up with him once more and he realized his mistake. The moving form was far too small to be the potions master.

The house elf squealed in terror at the sight of him, but quickly stammered out, "Master Snape is wanting Frizzy to let Master Lupin in when he is getting cold. Is Master Lupin wanting to come in?"

Coward, Lupin thought to himself, he sends a house elf to let me in rather than face me. He nodded to the house elf and followed her inside the house. But when he turned to walk down the corridor that led to Snape's room he was startled by the house elf suddenly throwing her tiny body in front of him, blocking his way.

"Oh, no, Master Lupin!" she squeaked. "Master Snape is saying no one is to bother him tonight!"

Well, of course - he'd instructed the house elves to keep Remus away by force. Lupin obligingly turned around and headed towards his own room without a protest.

He heard the sigh of relief that the house elf emitted before snapping her fingers and vanishing back to whatever duties she had. Lupin immediately turned around and headed back towards his original destination. It was time Snape faced him...one way or another.

XOXOXOX

"Go away!" Severus shouted for what must have been the fifteenth time. The infernal scratching at the door still did not cease, but instead - grew louder. There were snarling sounds now being added to the racket. Not very loud or overly threatening - more like the sounds of a frustrated, but determined animal.

Enough was enough - Snape heaved himself out of the chair and waited a moment to be sure of his balance before stalking to the door. The damned house elves obviously weren't worth a damn as guards. The blasted werewolf should never have been let into this wing of the house, much less at his door.

"What is it?!" he snapped as he wrenched open the door. The wolf that was Lupin bounded past him and his attempts to keep him on the other side of the door. Snape slammed the door shut behind the canine and crossed his arms - this gesture was becoming less and less intimidating as his belly got larger, but it was all he had left to show his displeasure besides his sneer.

"Well?" he asked, "it's not as if you are capable of conversation, Lupin. Perhaps you've come to piss on my rug?"

The werewolf glared at him with human eyes and for one moment it seemed as if Lupin was actually considering it.

"Don't even try it - you'll spend the rest of the night in a body bind if you so much as lift a leg. So...what shall we do now, Lupin? I mean - you were so eager to come in after all..."

Lupin continued to sit on his antique rug and glare at him. Snape could almost hear the bloody wolf trying to send his thoughts to him. Well, let him - Snape was too damned tired to care.

He turned away from the intruder and walked over to his bed, which was turned down for the night. The soft, warm sheets called out to him, but his bladder made itself known for the hundredth time that evening. Sighing, he turned back to head towards the lavatory only to

stumble against a hard mound of fur and bones. Lupin had stretched out next to his bed, his head on his front paws - eyes looking solemnly up at him.

"Move!" Snape growled. The werewolf shifted over slightly until Severus could walk around him, golden eyes watching every move he made. It was irritating to have a silent witness to his nightly routine. Whatever had made him bring the wolf to his rooms the night before in the first place? Now the idiot obviously thought he was welcome there every night.

Bladder emptied and candles snuffed - Snape tiredly climbed into the bed with a weary sigh. The aches and pains of his body were getting most tiresome - how much longer could the human body endure this kind of strain?

He became aware of the heavy breathing of the animal on the floor - it wasn't as annoying as he might have suspected. It was almost comforting to know such a strong presence was nearby - almost as if it were there to protect him. Never in his life had he thought that he needed such protection - he was quite used to relying on himself. Still...this pregnancy made him feel quite off-balance at times...sometimes even vulnerable.

Perhaps that was why he let the bloody werewolf stay in his house in the first place. Why he couldn't seem to deny the man anything.

Severus turned his head and peered over the edge of his bed. The bulky form of the wolf was just visible in the dim light. The sight was reassuring and he soon felt his eyelids grow heavy and close. His own breathing slowed and deepened - a soothing counterpoint to the sound from the floor.

Muffled groaning woke him - the now familiar sound of the transition from wolf to man. Severus pushed himself up with minor difficulty and glanced down to see the final rippling of muscles stretch back into place of his human form. As always it seemed as if the wizard was only semi-conscious of the change. His eyes were half open, but glazed. The sight stirred a feeling of sympathy and Snape pulled his wand out from beneath the covers.

"Wingardium Leviosa," he said quietly - directing the body into the bed beside him. He tugged the covers up over the naked form and lay back down, but - as happened all too often in his pregnancy - the call of nature forced him out of bed a moment later.

He shuffled back to bed and was relieved to see that the other man's eyes were now closed and his breathing evened to a deep sleep. Lupin would likely remain asleep until late morning - the transition always took a lot out of him.

Severus eased himself back into the bed and decided he would only lie down for a few minutes before dressing and heading downstairs. He was still saying that to himself when he drifted back to sleep - the warm body beside him an even more comforting presence than the wolf on the floor had been.

He started suddenly, realizing his mistake and tried to sit up, but a heavy arm across his chest pinned him in place.

"Knew you'd try to bolt again." The voice was heavy with sleep as Lupin lifted his head from his pillow - his arm stayed in place.

"Get off me, Lupin," Snape growled. He reached up to shove the arm off of him, but Remus moved with startling quickness and he was suddenly restrained by two firm hands on his shoulders. Lupin's face loomed above him, the gray strands in Lupin's hair were highlighted in the early morning light.



"I don't think so - not until you promise not to bolt. I didn't appreciate your little disappearance act yesterday," Remus growled back.

Severus was stunned at the fierce tone, not to mention the closeness of the other man's body. Lupin was leaning over him, but his legs weren't straddling him at least. Snape supposed it was only his big belly that stopped the other man from putting more of his weight on him. But the hands pinning his shoulders down were enough - Severus simply didn't have the leverage to break the hold. Defiance was his only alternative. He smoothly replaced his look of shock with one of annoyance with one brow raised.

"I am not here to amuse you, Lupin - I was busy yesterday. And I am today as well. Get. Off. Me."

Remus snarled at his words and Severus was seriously beginning to doubt that Lupin was completely human during the day of a full moon. He certainly wasn't acting his usual affable self. "That's a crock of shit, Snape. You're avoiding me." "Am I? Well, it certainly can't be because of your sunny personality, now can it? You're awfully cranky this morning, Lupin." Severus wished the man wasn't quite so close. The smell of sweat and the sight of Lupin's naked chest were quite disconcerting.

Remus blinked and slowly eased the pressure of his hands on Severus' shoulders, though he didn't remove them completely. "I'm sorry, Severus - you're right. I let my temper get away from me," he apologized in a softer tone.

Severus realized he'd preferred it when the werewolf was growling at him - the apology made him feel awkward and cranky himself. "Fine. Just get off me, then."

Lupin shook his head, "No. You'll just run away and hide again."

"For the last time: I was NOT hiding. I have certain duties to attend to."

Now it was Remus' eyebrow going up in a look of sarcasm. "Like what?"

Severus hated to explain himself and scowled. "Like making out my last will and testament - making certain plans and arrangements for the child's care. Making sure my land and property is kept safe until the child is old enough and in position to claim it. Little things of that nature."

Lupin looked suitably abashed and Severus reveled in the victory - no matter how temporary. "I - I hadn't realized..."

"No, obviously not. So, may I get up now or are you not finished manhandling me?"

Remus withdrew his hands and sat back in the bed without a word. It took more effort that he cared to admit to sit up after that. His back was protesting his recent attempts to struggle.

"Are you all right?"

Snape glared at the other man's contrite face without answering and put greater effort in concealing his stiffness as he got out of the bed. Once vertical, he opened his wardrobe to get a new robe out. He was quite conscious of the eyes on him as he moved about the room and hurriedly went to the lavatory to change, hoping Lupin would be gone when he was finished.

Severus took his time changing and washing up - unwilling to leave the lavatory. When he finally couldn't justify scowling at his face in the mirror any longer, he opened the door and strode out.

"Tea?" Remus stood just outside the door with a tray - two steaming cups of tea and a plate of dry toast on it.

Snape sighed, but nodded towards the fireplace and Lupin obligingly set the tray down on the small table next to the wingback chair. Conjuring up a second chair, he sat down next to Snape with a small smile.

"I know you said you were busy today, but I wanted to make sure you ate 'something' this morning. How is the morning sickness?"

"Better when someone doesn't mention it, thank you," Snape growled. He stirred a lump of sugar into his tea and sipped it cautiously. Normally he didn't like sugar or sweets, but lately he found himself craving them. If he wasn't careful he'd turn into Dumbledore - obsessing over sweets and biscuits; pockets bulging with them like a spoiled child.

Luckily for Snape, Lupin didn't feel the urge to prattle on that morning and the two nibbled on toast without another word. When the other man stood finally and brushed nonexistent crumbs from his robes, Snape almost regretted the loss of the quiet company.

"I'll leave you to your work, then, Severus. I've errands of my own...I have some Christmas shopping to do - I thought I'd walk to the edge of the forest and apparate to Diagon Alley. Do you need anything while I'm gone?"

Snape felt a momentary temptation to ask for a large slab of chocolate from Viviane's Chocolatier, but shook his head. "I've everything I need. Don't be long...you must take your potion again this evening..."

XOXOXOX

Lupin tromped through the snow towards the edge of the forest and breathed in the clean crisp air deeply. It was cold, but the skies were clear and he was in a rather happy mood. Not only had he succeeded in breaking through Snape's isolation, but he was also off to do some serious Christmas shopping for the first time in as long as he could remember. It was rather surreal to feel the jingle of coins in the leather pouch beneath his outer robes and know that he could afford to buy some decent presents. Of course, his happiness was tinged with regret that the money was only there because Sirius had died and left it to him, but he shook the feeling away as best he could by reminding himself that he was using it to make a very merry holiday for Harry - something his former lover would approve of heartily.

Apparating to Diagon Alley was easy enough, but it soon became evident to Remus that shopping would be a bit of a headache with the crowds roaming the streets and shops so close to the holidays.

"Red and green jumpers - special sale!"

"No, Harriet, you have quite enough robes as it is - "

"Stop pushing!"

"Let me through!"

"Buy one get one free - !"

"Mommy - look!"

Lupin dodged groups of shoppers and bellowing shopkeepers as he headed down the alley. He wasn't entirely sure what to get Harry now that he was faced with so many options.

His most obvious choice was a set of books in Flourish and Blotts that specialized in an advanced course of study for defensive spells and shielding. Lupin fingered the fine dragonhide leather covers and smiled to himself. He'd read the books in a library himself - it was quite pleasing to think of Harry having the reference books on hand to peruse at his leisure. They would surely come in handy during his future courses. The young man was rather focused on his plans to become an Auror and had taken to studying with greater zeal and enthusiasm than ever before.

As he left the shop with his heavy package, though, he was struck by the thought of what Sirius would have to say about such a serious gift for a teenager on Christmas. 'Surely you don't expect him to study \*all\* the time, Remus! Youth is for having fun and excitement.' And he would be right, after all...Harry needed a bit of distraction.

Glancing down the alley he caught sight of the Quality Quidditch Supplies just one shop down from the bookstore. As it often had in his youth, the window of the store was barely visible from the crowd of youngsters gawping at the display behind the glass.

It reminded him of the times James and Sirius and he had shopped before the beginning of terms at Hogwarts. The three would start off buying their list of books at Flourish and Blotts before his two friends would hurry him out the door to head over to see the latest brooms and supplies for sale. Lupin would have rather stayed in the bookstore, but he'd always enjoyed seeing the excitement and glee in his best friend's eyes as they looked around the shop. He enjoyed flying on occasion, too, but he'd never had the same thrill that they had had - and that Harry shared with them.

Deciding that it was time to become interested in all things flying - Lupin pressed through the crowd and toward the door. As he reached it, he glanced at the display that was so interesting and saw that there was in fact a new broom out - a Shooting Star 3000. 'Fastest broom ever!' the sign below it promised.

Lupin inwardly cringed at the idea of how much such a broom would cost - there was no price and he was quite sure that wasn't a good sign. And yet...something told him he should buy it. Harry's old broom...hardly old, really...wasn't working properly. Or so he'd heard. The other members of the Order of the Phoenix had mentioned in passing how Umbridge had possibly tampered with Harry's broom while it was in her possession. Whether it was simply neglect or obvious sabotage, no one could prove, but it was no longer trustworthy and after a particularly nasty fall Harry had resorted to using another teammate's spare broom. It was better than one of the school brooms, but not much. And Sirius never would have stood for that...he'd have replaced the broom already, Remus was sure.

Another purchase made...this time through direct credit from Gringotts. Lupin left the shop with a weary sigh his feet ached and his arms were full, but there was just one more present to buy. A quick glance at the apothecary store quickly dissuaded him from the obvious choice of present for Severus - not only wouldn't he know which potion ingredients to choose - even heavy dragonhide gloves or some other potions related paraphernalia would be next to useless while the man was still pregnant and unable to dabble in his art. Instead, he glanced down at another small shop along the way with a small grin - there was one thing he knew Snape 'would' be able to use...

XOX

Severus gently rubbed his belly, lost in thought as he absently listened to the faint classical music emanating from his mother's old music box on the desk beside him. The child was kicking, and while it didn't hurt, it was noticeable enough to stop him in mid task as he found himself focusing on the tiny life within that was asserting its presence with force. It was an odd sensation, but not unpleasant...

He'd heard that some medi-witches recommend talking to unborn children - that fetuses could hear and recognize voices at an early stage. Severus dismissed such sentimental rubbish as an excuse for other wizards and witches to coo and baby talk like imbeciles to swollen stomachs. He had a horrible vision of Dumbledore or one of the other professors at Hogwarts doing so to his own stomach and shuddered. It was yet another reason to remain well away from such awkward and annoying company.

At least Lupin had the sense to keep his own distance...most of the time. He shifted in his chair as he remembered the press of warm naked flesh on top of his own clothed form. Lupin's assertive behavior that morning had certainly been startling...and arousing. Severus pushed that train of thought away and closed the music box next to him with a loud snap, annoyed at his reaction.

"Don't do that - it was beautiful."

Severus was startled to see Lupin standing in the doorway with a wistful smile on his face. "The music? My mother liked it...you can borrow it if you want," he said roughly, shoving the music box to the edge of the desk for the other wizard to take.

"I wasn't referring to the music so much as the sight."

That comment made Snape's eyes open wide in surprise before narrowing in suspicion. "Excuse me?" he said in his coldest voice.

Lupin shook his head ruefully and stepped fully into the room with a good natured shrug. "I meant seeing you by the window - with the light shining on you just so...holding your hand to your belly...it just looked like such a beautiful moment. A moment frozen in time...what disturbed you before I spoke?" he asked curiously.

Severus pushed himself out of the chair and deliberately ignored the question as he shuffled papers on his desk. "What is it you wanted, Lupin? I thought you were shopping today."

"Oh, I was. Finished. I had no idea just how busy it would be...I should have shopped ahead of time. I managed to find everything I was looking for, though..." Lupin strolled around the office, poking at books on the shelves and glancing out the window before looking back at Snape with a friendly smile.

Snape realized he'd been caught staring at the man instead of looking at his papers and quickly shoved the ones in his hand in a drawer and looked away.

"Have you had supper yet?" Lupin crossed his arms and leaned against a bookcase. He looked as if he belonged in the room - like a piece of furniture. Unmovable.

Severus frowned and would have lied, but his stomach spoke for him. He glowered at the chuckle from the other wizard and sniffed disdainfully. "Obviously not. I'll have the house elf bring me something - you go ahead and eat."

"Oh, I will...I'll have the house elves bring us both supper up here then. This table by the window should do." Papers and books were rearranged in neat piles before Severus' horrified eyes as Lupin made room on the messy surface.

Deciding that his objections would only lead to further loss of dignity he ignored the irritating presence of the other wizard as they waited for dinner to arrive. Lupin made himself quite at home, snagging a book off one of the shelves to peruse while Severus busied himself at his desk. Within moments two plates appeared on the cleared table and both wizards sat down to a

hearty stew and warm crusty rolls with butter. Severus hungrily attacked his plate while Lupin unsuccessfully hid a smile behind his goblet of wine. Still, it was a significantly more pleasant hour than he had expected and Snape was much too satisfied by the good food and quiet company to complain when Lupin urged him to go to bed early and sleep.

"Afterall - I'll be outside for a few hours. You should rest."

Severus normally would have protested at the idea that he would miss the other man's company, but he couldn't summon the energy to care if the werewolf planned to join him in his rooms that night or not. Let the mangy wolf do as he liked...he was too tired to be bothered.

Later that night he woke to the scratching at his door and silently got up to let the Lupin in, his wand and any incantations that would have opened it for him forgotten in his tiredness. The wolf quietly barked a greeting and then nudged him back towards the bed, following him. Snape heard the wolf settle at the foot with a contented sigh. As Snape drifted to sleep he wasn't the slightest bit unsettled to realize that he was actually coming to accept the routine.

XxXxX

Christmas eve and the house was filled with anticipation and the pleasant smell of gingerbread and baked apples. Lupin stood in the foyer and checked the time for the millionth time that morning. Harry was arriving any moment with his security entourage and the werewolf found himself suddenly stricken with nerves at the possibility of the teenager's reaction to Snape's presence.

There was a sound behind him and Remus jumped and turned to see Snape smirking at him from the stairs. "Nervous, Lupin? Don't worry - the Boy Who Lived must be fashionably late in order to make his grand entrance."

Remus gritted his teeth - this didn't bode well if Snape was already insulting someone who hadn't arrived yet. He was debating whether or not to plead for good behavior from the man when there was a brisk knock at the door.

Lupin cast one last desperate glance in Severus' direction and found that the wizard had disappeared in his moment of inattention. Wondering at how fast a pregnant man could move, he answered the door as there was another impatient knock, louder than before.

"Finally. Your wards could stand some fortifying, Lupin - best tell the master of the house that it only took me ten minutes to find a way through." Moody's craggy face was smug and disapproving at the same time as he stared at Lupin with his one normal eye - the magical one was roving as usual.

Remus was surprised Snape didn't suddenly appear to answer the insult with a few of his own. "I'm aware of the hole in the wards, Moody - we deliberately timed it for when you were scheduled to arrive. I figured you'd find the weak hole eventually and come through. I must admit I thought you'd manage it a few moments faster, though."

The frosty glare that met him with those words sparked a thrill of satisfaction. Lupin quickly admonished himself at realizing this and wondered just how much his secluded time with Snape was effecting his own personality traits. He covered the awkward moment with a hearty laugh and would have clapped the other man on the shoulder if he weren't sure that Moody'd cut his arm off and was grateful when he heard Tonks laugh from behind the battered Auror.

"That was my fault, Remus - I tripped on a rock buried in the snow. Moody healed my sprain and we were slightly delayed. You might want to take better care of the lawn out here," she said ruefully.

"It was a boulder, not a rock. Everyone but you was able to avoid it," the old man said gruffly to her. But the tension had thankfully passed and the Auror turned sideways so that Lupin was finally able to see Harry's smiling face from behind the other man.

"Hullo, Remus. Happy Christmas." Harry's smile was honest enough, but Lupin could see a hint of sadness behind it. Sirius' absence was obviously much felt at the moment and Remus found himself wishing for the thousandth time that his lover had been more cautious and responsible. His godson needed him and he'd been too reckless with his safety. Lupin knew he must be a rather pathetic replacement for a godfather in the teen's eyes. No one could compete with Sirius Black's sheer force of personality and charisma.

"Happy Christmas, Harry. I bet you're all tired from your trip. You didn't have any trouble beyond Tonks' clumsiness, did you?" He gestured for everyone to follow him in, but only Harry entered the house.

"We've done our duty - I'd stay to make sure the security is up to snuff, but Dumbledore's orders were clear," Moody growled. "Apparently he trusts you two to keep him safe..." His tone made it clear that he disagreed with the notion, but the Auror turned and trudged away without further ado.

Tonks smiled wistfully and reached over to give Remus and Harry quick hugs before she hurried off after the crotchety old man. "Happy Christmas! See you in a few days!"

Remus watched them disappear into the forest to where they could apparate before closing the door with a relieved thud. He wouldn't have minded Nimphadora's company, but he couldn't help but be thankful he'd seen the last of Moody for a few days.

"He's full of the holiday spirit, isn't he?" Harry said with an impish grin.

"Yes - no doubt he's making Tonks' holiday a cheerful one. I'll have to get her something after the holidays as a thank you gift for putting up with him today. Do you have your things?" Remus asked.

Harry pulled out a shrunken trunk and Lupin waved him towards the stairs to show him his room. "I've given you the room next to mine so you can find me if you need anything. The house elves are helpful, but they are working themselves into a tizzy over the holiday preparations."

Harry's eyes were wide as he took in the grandness of the staircase and the furnishings. As Lupin pushed open the guest room door, Harry whistled at the opulent bed and furniture. "Who's your friend, Remus? You were mysterious in you owls. This isn't \*your\* house, is it?"

Lupin chuckled at the thought of the mansion being in his own family - the Lupins were a poor lot. Always had been. "No, it's a friend's house...you'll meet him at lunch, I'm sure. Why don't you clean up? I'll knock when it's time."

XxXxX

Remus walked Harry down to the dining room and enjoyed the look on the boy's face as he took in more of the sights of the house along the way. There was a large tree in the sitting room spelled with at least a hundred fairy lights and twinkling ornaments. Harry seemed even more impressed by the spicy aromas coming from the kitchen as they sat down at the table.

"Something smells wonderful," he said as he sat down opposite of Remus.

Lupin smiled and nodded, "Yes, I think these house elves have been trained in a fine culinary

school - every meal is an experience."

"They were - my father was fastidious and demanded only the best."

Harry's eyes popped out at the sight of Severus Snape entering the dining room in the same forbidding stride that he had roamed the halls of Hogwarts. Remus wondered just how he managed it with such a large belly. But the belly was not in evidence now - there was a powerful glamour cast on him that even Lupin couldn't see through. Apparently Severus had been studying.

"Snape! What are you doing here?" Harry asked bluntly, staring at the potions master in what could only be horror.

"\*Professor\* Snape, Harry. This is his home. And he was kind enough to allow me to invite you here for the holiday," Remus reminded him. He was irritated at Harry's obvious lack of respect for Severus. He could understand fearing and even disliking his potions master, but such blatant disrespect was out of character and unacceptable from Harry.

Harry looked from Remus back to Snape and seemed to get control of his temper enough to accept Lupin's admonishment. "Thank you, professor," he muttered.

Severus had stood still and silent as Lupin handled the situation, but he now smirked at the chastised boy and sat down at the head of the long table and draped a napkin across his lap with a flourish. Remus was quite grateful for the sudden appearance of food on their table which forestalled any comment Severus was undoubtedly about to make.

They ate in silence - Harry and Snape were obviously pretending the other did not exist and Remus couldn't think of a neutral topic to engage his two companions in and so he ate quietly as well. The food was excellent, as usual, but it might as well have been swill for all the enjoyment the three got from it. Harry finished first and excused himself to return to his room.

"Well, that was fun," Remus said with a sigh.

"Indeed. Remind me of that the next time you get it in your head to invite insolent children into my home."

"You aren't really helping, you know - you could try to strike up a conversation with him. Be a gracious host."

Snape gave him a thunderstruck look. "Need I remind you that it was Potter who demanded to know what I was doing in my home?! The same brat who has never spoke a respectful word in my presence in the five years I have had the thankless chore of teaching him?!"

"Have you ever given him a chance? You hated him before you ever met him - and you have delighted in blaming him for his parentage even though the boy never even knew his parents or your history with them. I admit that Harry has crossed the line in his behavior to you, but if you are angry at his lack of respect for you...well, you only have yourself to blame." Lupin tossed his own napkin on the table and left the dining room and a silent Snape behind.

The door to Harry's guest room was shut and Remus wasn't in the mood to deal with a surly teenager at the moment. He crossed over to his own room and sat down on his bed with a sigh. What had he been thinking?

"Remus?" Harry stood at the open door hesitantly.

"Yes?"

Harry took that as permission to enter and sat next to him at the foot of the bed. "...I wanted to apologize."

Remus gave him a small smile. "That's good...but I'm not the one you should apologize to."

Harry looked disgruntled at that and looked around Lupin's room instead of responding. His eyes took in the fine furnishings of the room and Lupin's trunk shoved in a corner before alighting on the small framed photo on his bedside table. It was a picture of a young Sirius and Remus standing by the Quidditch pitch. Sirius wore his Quidditch uniform and Remus was proudly sporting his house scarf - the picture had been taken by James with Lilly's muggle camera. Since it wasn't a wizarding photo - the image was frozen in time, unmoving.

"Is that..." Harry started, leaning forward for a better look.

Remus picked the battered frame and handed it to him to get a better look. "Sirius and I after a game - Gryffindors won, obviously, or Sirius wouldn't look so happy."

Harry handled the picture with care, staring intently at it. "He does look happy..."

Remus blinked at the sudden tears that threatened as he smiled wistfully. "I wanted a reminder of how he used to be...how we used to be..." For a minute he worried that he might have given something away, but Harry seemed to take it innocently and continued to stare at Sirius' young face for a few more moments before handing the picture back.

"I miss him..." Harry whispered, staring down at his fingers as they twisted in the loose material of his trousers.

"I do, too...but I know that he's in a better place. And he'll be waiting for us there someday..."

Harry gave a reluctant nod and looked up at him. "Yeah..." His eyes were glistening with tears behind the lenses of his glasses and Remus held a cautious arm out. It seemed to be all the boy needed as he was suddenly hugging Lupin in a fierce grip. There were no sobs or shaking - Harry just held him tight. An anchor in a storm.

XxXxX

Supper was a far easier affair than lunch had been. Both Snape and Harry seemed determined to be on their best behavior. They made polite small talk and commented on the food. But never to each other. Both talked only to Lupin - behaving as if the other wasn't there at all. Remus supposed it was an improvement.

After their meal they retired to the sitting room - a fire crackled merrily in the fireplace and the Christmas tree glowed in the corner of the room. Harry settled before the fire with a book. The title was too small to make out, but Remus thought it said 'Auror Trials'. Snape took up one of the large wing back chairs on the opposite side of the fire and stuck his nose into another book - the title incomprehensible to Lupin. Probably had a disguising spell on it - paranoid bastard that he was. Remus' own book lay unheeded on his own lap as he sat in another chair by the fire, closer to Harry. The room was warm and cozy and the presence of the other two gave him a comfortable feeling that he was content to bask in for the rest of the night. No matter what happened in the future...he was happy that the feeling of loneliness he'd felt most of his life was missing at that moment.

To Be Continued....

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